

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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Instruction Memorandum No. 2004-194
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To: All Field Officials

From: Director

Subject: Integration of Best Management Practices into Application for Permit to Drill Approvals and Associated Rights-of-Way

Program Areas: Oil & Gas Operations; Geothermal Operations; Helium Operations; Lands & Realty.

Purpose: The purpose for issuing this Instruction Memorandum (IM) is to establish a policy that Field Offices consider Best Management Practices (BMPs) in National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents to mitigate anticipated impacts to surface and subsurface resources, and also to encourage operators to actively consider BMPs during the application process.

Background: BMPs are innovative, dynamic, and economically feasible mitigation measures applied on a site-specific basis to reduce, prevent, or avoid adverse environmental or social impacts. BMPs are applied to management actions to aid in achieving desired outcomes for safe, environmentally sound resource development, by preventing, minimizing, or mitigating adverse impacts and reducing conflicts. The early incorporation of BMPs into Application for Permit to Drill (APDs) by the oil and gas operator helps to ensure an efficient and timely APD process.

Policy/Action: All Field Offices shall incorporate appropriate BMPs into proposed APDs and associated on and off-lease rights-of-way approvals after appropriate NEPA evaluation.

BMPs to be considered in nearly all circumstances include the following:

- Interim reclamation of well locations and access roads soon after the well is put into production;
- Painting of all new facilities a color which best allows the facility to blend with the background, typically a vegetated background;
- Design and construction of all new roads to a safe and appropriate standard, “no higher than necessary” to accommodate their intended use; and
- Final reclamation recontouring of all disturbed areas, including access roads, to the original contour or a contour which blends with the surrounding topography.

Other BMPs are more suitable for Field Office consideration on a case-by-case basis depending on their effectiveness, the balancing of increased operating costs vs. the benefit to the public and resource values, the availability of less restrictive mitigation alternatives, and other site specific factors. Examples of typical case-by-case BMPs include, but are not limited to the following:

- Installation of raptor perch avoidance;
- Burying of distribution power lines and/or flow lines in or adjacent to access roads;
- Centralizing production facilities;
- Submersible pumps;
- Belowground wellheads;
- Drilling multiple wells from a single pad;
- Noise reduction techniques and designs;
- Wildlife monitoring;
- Seasonal restriction of public vehicular access;
- Avoiding placement of production facilities on hilltops and ridgelines;
- Screening facilities from view;
- Bioremediation of oil field wastes and spills; and
- Use of common utility or right-of-way corridors.

A menu of typical BMPs can be found on the BLM Washington Office Fluid Minerals website. The website is updated frequently and submission of new BMPs and photos is encouraged.

<http://www.blm.gov/nhp/300/wo310/O&G/Ops/operations.html>

BMPs have been developed and utilized by numerous oil and gas operators throughout the nation. When implementing new BMPs, Field Offices are encouraged to work with affected operators early, to explain how BMPs may fit into their development proposals and how BMPs can be implemented with the least economic impact. Discuss potential resource impacts with the operators and seek their recommended solutions while encouraging operators to incorporate necessary and effective BMPs into their proposals. BMPs not incorporated into the permit application by the operator may be considered and evaluated through the NEPA process and incorporated into the permit as APD Conditions of Approval or right-of-way stipulations.

Field Offices must be cautious to avoid the “one size fits all” approach to the application of BMPs. BMPs, by their very nature, are dynamic innovations and must be flexible enough to respond to new data, field research, technological advances, and market conditions. Following implementation, Field Offices should monitor, evaluate, and modify BMPs as necessary for use in future permit approvals.

The overall goal of the Bureau is to promote the best examples of responsible oil and gas development. Public lands should be showcases of good stewardship while providing for responsible, sustainable, and efficient development of the nation’s oil and gas resources. BLM will use the Quality Assurance Team (QAT) and General Management Evaluation (GME) processes in order to review our progress. To recognize good environmental stewardship work through the use of BMPs, BLM is establishing an annual “Best Management Practice” awards program with annual awards for industry and BLM offices, the details of which will be available subsequently.

Timeframe: Immediately.

Budget Impacts: Minimal.

Manual and Handbook Sections Affected: None.

Coordination: AD-200.

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